**FOLMC and Library Board Joint Position Paper on FY 2021 Operating Budget**

We agree wholeheartedly with the county government’s determination that we conduct governmental business equitably and use appropriate outcome indicators. In particular, we need better outreach to assure that underserved groups are encouraged to use government services. Our county’s increasing diversity certainly requires this.

Our libraries are well suited to contribute to this effort.  They open their doors to everyone and contribute significantly to solving one of the county’s enduring inequities—the Achievement Gap, a condition that falls most heavily on minorities and lower income groups.

The Executive and the Council have correctly concluded with the March 7 initiative that getting more of our children ready for kindergarten is the best way to attack this inequity.  Research shows that children who are read to every day from birth to kindergarten by their caregivers are significantly more ready for kindergarten than those who are not. Furthermore, this reading is most productive from birth through three.

Our libraries already address these preschool years with hundreds of literacy programs every month that encourage caregivers to do such reading by conducting reading programs on-site and providing caregivers with books to take home and read to their children.

According to County Statistics, caregivers for children under five have doubled the rate at which they use child related library resources and programs over the last five years.

With 46% of our youngsters not ready for kindergarten, the need to increase that rate with additional outreach is clear.  This will require more resources, in the first instance a new librarian charged with reaching out to all parts of the childcare community, particularly those communities that may not yet know about the libraries enhancing literacy programs.  We need to get that curve headed up again to cut into that 46% and with additional resources the MCPL can do so. This will mean more children read to, thus more children ready for kindergarten.

As Mr. Elrich has said many times, “Just imagine being five years old and already two years behind.”  Each additional child that is brought into our libraries’ sustaining circle of early literacy, is one less child likely to be faced with that predicament, a brutal predicament that can endure throughout his or her school years.

We therefore ask for funding for an additional librarian charged with reaching out to all our childcare communities, making the parents and caregivers aware of the life-changing early literacy programs and resources they offer. Furthermore, we believe these needs are so urgent that funding for this new librarian should be found, in the first instance, in the $7 million fund the Council has already appropriated to support kindergarten readiness.

We also believe money should be found in FY 2021 to make our libraries more available to more people.  Many from lower income groups and minorities work long, irregular hours and can get to the libraries only on the weekend.  While some of our branches are open on Sunday, they offer limited service and do not provide literacy and other programs. Thus, we urge that money be found to have all branches opened for eight hours on Sunday with the same programs now conducted on weekdays.

Finally, so that everyone across the county can schedule their activities easily, we ask that money be found so that all library branches can have the same hours.  People should not have to waste precious time searching the patchwork of different schedules in different branches.

METRICS

To see if these enhancements are effective, we suggest MCPL and MCPS make the following refinements in their measurements, using existing data—enhanced with newly collected information to:

1. Use the count of students who received Free and Reduced Price Meals by school together with suggestions from MCPS, DHHS and other partners to select areas in the county that need intervention to improve prekindergarten readiness. These would be the initial places where MCPL would concentrate its efforts at outreach.

2.   Report the number of children who participate in reading readiness activities outside of the formal library settings but served by the library staff as well as those who attend storytime and other activities in the branches.

3.   Count the children and parents or caregivers who participate in reading readiness activities and the materials circulated in support of this goal.

4.   Ask the Montgomery County Public Schools to include a data item on the MCPS form used for school registration that asks the parents of children entering Kindergarten or First Grade if they have used the MCPL or participated in a program run by the MCPL staff for their children.  This information can be aggregated by the child's school to identify areas needing additional outreach to young children.

Over time, these measures should tell us if more children are being read to in such a way as to make them more ready for kindergarten and show how these efforts are addressing the problem of uneven readiness for kindergarten.